

# Notable Points about *Sīmā*: The Boundary for Community Transactions

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## **Q. What is the meaning of ‘*sīmā*’?**

In the *Pāḷi* language, ‘*sīmā*’ means ‘boundary.’ In the Vinaya, however, it refers to a boundary within which monks can conduct community transactions (*saṅghakamma*).

## **Q. Why was *sīmā* allowed by the Buddha at first?**

*Sīmā* was allowed by the Buddha so that monks living in a certain area could recite the *Pāṭimokkha* in harmony.

## **Q. Why is ‘*sīmā*’ important?**

It is important because without a ‘*sīmā*,’ legal transactions of the community (*saṅghakamma*) such as ‘ordination’ (*pabbajjā*), ‘sabbath’ (*uposatha*), ‘invitation’ (*pavāraṇā*), and ‘giving a *kathina* robe’ cannot be performed.

## **Q. When monks are engaging in a community transaction within a *sīmā*, can monks and unordained people approach them?**

When monks are conducting a transaction by gathering within a *sīmā*, individuals such as laypersons and novices should not come within two handspans of the outermost monk. If they do, although the transaction does not become invalid, the monks commit an offense.

Furthermore, monks should not be in the area within the *sīmā* beyond two handspans from the outermost monk. If there are monks within the *sīmā* beyond two handspans of the outermost monk, the community transaction becomes invalid.

**Q. How many kinds of *sīmā* are there?**

In brief, there are two kinds of *sīmā*: (i) a *sīmā* consecrated by a gathering of four or more monks by reciting *kammavācā*, (ii) a *sīmā* which is naturally a *sīmā* without being consecrated by reciting *kammavācā*.

Among these two, the first kind of *sīmā* is also called '*baddhasīmā*' (a *sīmā* that is bound by reciting *kammavācā*), and the second kind of *sīmā* is called '*abaddhasīmā*' (a *sīmā* that is not bound by *kammavācā*).

There are three kinds of *baddha-sīmā*: (i) Part (*khaṇḍa*), (ii) same communion (*samānasaṃvāsaka*), (iii) Non-separation (*avippavāsa*). There are three kinds of *Abaddha-sīmā*: (i) Village (*gāma*), (ii) 'water-thrown' (*udakukkhepa*), (iii) Seven *abbhantara* (*sattabbhantara*).

**Q. Is it necessary to consecrate a *sīmā*?**

No. There are two kinds of *sīmā*, namely the *sīmā* that is consecrated and the *sīmā* that is not.

**Q. Why is it necessary to consecrate a *baddha sīmā* although village and so on are already *sīmā*?**

When monks perform community transactions, all monks gather at the place where the transaction is being performed, whether the *sīmā* is big or small. If there is a monk who cannot come, he must agree to the transaction by giving his consent. If he cannot give his consent, he must go out of the boundary of the *sīmā*. If there is such a monk who did not give his consent, did not come to the gathering, did not go out of the boundary of *sīmā*, then the transaction performed by the monks become invalid.

If there are only one or two monasteries in a village boundary, it may be possible to gather all monks to one place. However, it may not be possible to do so if there are many monasteries in a big village. Furthermore, it is also not a possible task to prevent a monk from entering the boundary of *sīmā* because of the boundary of *gāma-sīmā* is big.

**Q. How many monks are necessary to consecrate a *sīmā*?**

There should be at least four fully ordained monks.

**Q. What kind of *sīmā* is not consecrated?**

A village (*gāma*) which includes town and city, seven ‘*abbhantara*’ in an area where there are no residences, and ‘water thrown’ (*udakukkhepa*). The ‘water thrown’ *sīmā* is also called ‘water *sīmā*.’

**Q. Why is it necessary to remove the *sīmā* from an area before consecrating a new *sīmā*?**

If a *sīmā* is consecrated touching the boundary of another *sīmā* or overlapping with another *sīmā*, its consecration is invalid. Therefore, the procedure for the ‘removal of *sīmā*’ is necessary to ensure that there was no *sīmā* consecrated in that area. If, in any case, there was a *sīmā*, it is considered a fault of ‘*sīmāsaṅkāra*’ (mixing different *sīmās*).

**Q. Why do monks stand separately when chanting *kammavācā*?**

If they touch, it can lead to the possible fault of ‘*sīmāsaṅkāra*,’ mixing one *sīmā* with another.

**Q. What is the size of the smallest *sīmā*?**

The smallest valid *sīmā* is one where 21 monks can sit down. A *sīmā* smaller than this size is considered invalid.

**Q. What kind of *sīmā* is considered suitable in size?**

The consecration of a *sīmā* is deemed successful if it has enough space for 21 monks to sit. There are different types of *sīmā* transactions, and the highest number of monks required for a transaction is 21. Therefore, a *sīmā* should be large enough to accommodate 21 monks. If it is smaller than this, it is categorized as a ‘very small *sīmā*’ and becomes a faulty or invalid *sīmā*.

**Q. How to calculate the size of the smallest *sīmā*?**

The space for a monk is about 2 square feet. Therefore, the least requirement for a proper *sīmā* is 21 sections of each 2 square feet. If we calculate accurately, there will be three rows of seven squares each. This will be 14 foot in length and 6 foot in breadth. This is the size of the smallest *sīmā*. One can also arrange the 21 squares in other ways.

**Q. Is it possible to make a square?**

It is difficult to make exact room for 21 people with equal length and breadth. Therefore, it is better if the area is calculated for 25 people, five persons in length and five in breadth. In this way, one can measure about 10 square feet.

**Q. What is the size of the largest *sīmā*?**

If a *sīmā* is consecrated in an area of 3 *yujanas* (about 27 miles), then it is the largest *sīmā*. If the size is more than 3 *yujanas*, then it is extremely large.

**Q. What are the three requirements (*sampatti*) for a successful consecration of a *sīmā*?**

The three Requirements are:

- (1) Valid Boundary sign (*Nimitta*)
- (2) Valid Assembly (*Parisa*)
- (3) Valid Recitation of Legal procedure (*Kammavācā*)

**Q. What are the factors that make the *sīmā* invalid?**

There are 11 factors:

- (1) Too small *sīmā*
- (2) Too big *sīmā*
- (3) *Sīmā* that skips 'boundary sign' (*nimitta*)
- (4) A *sīmā* which is consecrated by making shadow as boundary sign
- (5) A *sīmā* which does not have boundary sign
- (6) A *sīmā* which is consecrated by standing outside the area of *sīmā*
- (7) A *sīmā* which is consecrated on a river.
- (8) A *sīmā* which is consecrated in an ocean.
- (9) A *sīmā* which is consecrated in a natural lake

(10) The boundary of *sīmā* is connected to another *sīmā*

(11) The boundary of a *sīmā* is overlapping the boundary another *sīmā*

**Q. Is it possible to consecrate a *sīmā* in a river, ocean, or natural lake?**

Rivers, oceans, and natural lakes cannot be consecrated as *sīmā*.

**Q. Is it possible to perform community legal procedures (*saṅghakamma*) in a river, ocean, or natural lake?**

Yes, community legal procedures (*saṅghakamma*) can be performed in rivers, oceans, or natural lakes, as these areas are considered natural *sīmā* without the need for consecration.

**Q. Is it possible to perform community transactions in a lake created by humans?**

No, only a ‘natural lake’ (*jātassara*) is considered a *sīmā*. This term refers to a lake that is naturally formed and not created by humans.

**Q. Is it possible to use flowing water as a boundary mark?**

No, only stable water in a tank or vessel can be used as a boundary mark, not flowing water.

**Q. Is it necessary to throw water and create a boundary marker when using ‘*udakukkhepa-sīmā*’?**

No, when monks enter the water, the area about the size where a medium-sized person can throw water or sand automatically becomes the boundary.

**Q. How is the water or sand thrown?**

Water or sand is thrown without lifting the hand.

**Q. How many kinds of boundary signs (*nimitta*) are suitable?**

There are eight kinds of suitable boundary signs:

(i) Mountain

(ii) Rock

(iii) Forest

(iv) Tree

(v) Road

(vi) Ant hill

(vii) River

(viii) Water

**Q. How should a *sīmā* boundary be placed?**

The boundary mark should be placed in a clockwise direction in several directions and finally end in the same direction which was declared first. For example, if the marking starts at the eastern direction, the marking should end by declaring the eastern boundary mark again.

The method is as follows:

Expert in Vinaya: What is the sign in the eastern direction? (*puratthimāya disāya kiṃ nimittam?*)

Boundary marker: It is a mountain, Venerable Sir! (*Pabbato bhante*)

Expert in Vinaya: This mountain is the boundary marker (*eso pabbato nimittam*)

**Q. How many times should the Q and A between the expert in Vinaya and the boundary marker be conducted?**

Once is sufficient. Some communities perform it three times.

**Q. Is it necessary for an Expert in Vinaya and the Boundary marker to be monks?**

The Expert in Vinaya should be a monk, but the Boundary Marker can be either an ordained monk or an unordained individual.

**Q. Is it necessary to use the *Pāli* language when fixing boundary marks?**

No, one can use Burmese or other languages.

**Q. How many boundary markers (*nimitta*) should be used?**

One or two are not suitable; more than that is appropriate.

**Q. What is the meaning of 'pāsāda'?**

The word 'pāsāda' refers to a building that is multi-story, with at least two stories.

**Q. Is it possible to consecrate a *sīmā* only on the upper floor of a building?**

Yes, it is possible. If the building has many floors, only one floor can be consecrated.

**Q. What is the name of the *sīmā* in *Pāḷi* that is consecrated on the upper floor?**

Upper-story *sīmā* (*uparipāsāda-sīmā*).

**Q. What are the important points to consider when consecrating a *sīmā* on the upper floor?**

There are three important points to consider when consecrating a *sīmā* on the upper floor:

(i) The wall should not act as a 'boundary marker' (*nimitta*). Signs such as rocks should be placed as 'boundary markers' inward from the wall.

(ii) The space should be large enough for 21 monks to sit down within the handspan of one another.

**Q. What is the suitable distance between the wall and the rock signs?**

The boundary markers should be placed six fingers or one foot inward from the wall.

**Q. Is the procedure for the removal of *sīmā* necessary if a *sīmā* is consecrated on the upper floor of the building?**

No, it is not necessary.

**Q. In what case will the *sīmā* consecrated on the upper floor make the lower floor also a *sīmā*?**

If the four walls inside the designated area on the lower floor are continuous with the upper floor and the area is big enough for 21 persons to sit, then the lower floor also becomes a *sīmā*.

**Q. What kind of *sīmā* is referred to as ‘*visumṅāma*’ (separate village)?**

If a king or the government declares a space within a village as a separate area with special regulations (historically used to be a non-taxed area given to a person), this area automatically becomes a ‘separate village *sīmā*.’ It means that if a village is owned by one person, the ‘separate village’ is owned by another person.

**Q. What is the difference between ‘*gāma-sīmā*’ or ‘village area’ (*gāmakhetta*) and *visumṅāma*?**

The *visumṅāma* is an area within a *gāmasīmā* which is naturally a *sīmā* without the need for consecration. The village area which is owned by a person is called ‘*gāmakhetta*.’ Here, the term ‘village’ also refers to a town or city legally declared as such by the king or government.

**Q. What kind of *sīmā* is called a ‘tied off’ (*baddha-sīmā*)?**

It is a *sīmā* which is consecrated formally by four or more monks reciting the formal action (*kammavācā*). It has a fixed boundary.

**Q. What kind of *sīmā* is called ‘not tied off’ (*abaddha-sīmā*)?**

A *sīmā* which is not consecrated formally by four or more monks reciting the formal action (*kammavācā*). There are three kinds of *abaddha-sīmā*: village, uninhabited area with seven *abbhantara* around, and ‘water thrown’ (*udakukkhepa*) which includes river, ocean, and natural lake. One *abbhantara* has 28 handspans. Therefore, 7 *abbhantara* means 392 handspans. The ‘water thrown’ *sīmā* is so called because the area is demarcated by throwing water or sand.

**Q. What is Great-*sīmā* (*Mahāsīmā*) and what is ‘partial *sīmā*’ (*khaṇḍa-sīmā*)?**

A large area such as the entire expanse of a monastery is referred to as Great-*sīmā*. A *sīmā* consecrated within a Great-*sīmā* is termed ‘partial *sīmā*.’ Performing legal transactions (*saṅgha-kamma*) in a vast area with many residing monks can be challenging. Therefore, to facilitate legal transactions, a relatively smaller partial *sīmā* is consecrated. In a partial *sīmā*, legal transactions can take place without the necessity for all monks in the Great-*sīmā* to be present there.



**Q. How are *Mahāsīmā* and *Khaṇḍa-sīmā* consecrated?**

First, the *khaṇḍa-sīmā* is consecrated. Subsequently, after leaving an interspace outside the boundary of the *khaṇḍa-sīmā*, the *Mahāsīmā* is consecrated.

**Q. What is the meaning of ‘interspace’ (*sīmantarikā*)?**

The space kept outside the boundary markers of a consecrated *sīmā* is called ‘interspace.’ It is an area that is clear of *sīmā* due to the procedure of ‘removing *sīmā*,’ but not inside the area that has been consecrated as a new *sīmā*.

**Q. How large should the size of the ‘interspace’ be?**

It is recommended to keep a space of one handspan.

**Q. In some *sīmās*, there are inner boundary marks and outer boundary marks. What are they?**

To demarcate the interspace, boundary marks are placed after each of the boundary marks of a *sīmā* to indicate that that area is not a *sīmā*.

**Q. Why is it necessary to consecrate a *baddha-sīmā* within a *visumṅāma-sīmā*?**

The *visumṅāma* can be taken back by the king or the government. Therefore, a *baddha-sīmā* is consecrated.

**Q. What kind of *sīmā* is referred to as ‘same dwelling’ (*samānasaṃvāsaka*)?**

When a *baddha sīmā* is consecrated, the first recitation of *kammavācā* is for the creation of a ‘same dwelling.’ Monks living there can perform legal transactions together. Therefore, a *baddha-sīmā* can also be called a ‘*samānasaṃvāsaka-sīmā*.’

**Q. What kind of *sīmā* is referred to as ‘non-separation’ (*avippavāsa*)?**

Following the consecration of the ‘same dwelling’ *sīmā*, the next recitation of *kammavācā* is for the ‘non-separation’ *sīmā*. Here, monks can live separated from the three robes that they have determined.

**Q. Why is a ‘non-separation’ *sīmā* consecrated after the consecration of the ‘same dwelling’ *sīmā*?**

This ensures that the ‘same dwelling *sīmā*’ cannot be removed, as it is covered by the ‘non-separation’ *sīmā*.

**Q. When removing the *sīmā*, which one should be removed first?**

The ‘non-separation’ *sīmā* should be removed before the ‘same dwelling.’

**Q. How is a ‘village area’ (*gāmakhetta*) *sīmā* consecrated?**

If there are monks in the area who cannot attend, they should stay inside the consecrated *sīmā*. They can also enter rivers, oceans, or natural lakes in that area, which are considered natural *sīmā*. If the monks are unable to do so, they must come to the area where the *sīmā* is being consecrated and stay within two handspans (*hatthapāsa*) of the community of monks. Alternatively, they can send their approval (*chanda*) to the community.

**Q. What is the distance covered by *hatthapāsa*?**

The area that can be reached with the hand, approximately two handspans.

**Q. Will communal transactions become invalid if an electricity wire extends from outside the boundary of the *sīmā* to inside?**

Some teachers suggest that if the wire extends from one baddha-*sīmā* to another, it creates ‘*sīmā-saṅkāra*,’ meaning the boundary of one *sīmā* is mixed with another. They remove the wire before performing communal transactions. However, other teachers argue that this does not create *sīmāsaṅkāra*. This viewpoint is supported by a saying in *Vimativinodani-ṭīkā*, which states that a tree branch can create ‘*sīmā-saṅkāra*.’ Similarly, in the ‘water-thrown’ *sīmā*, it is mentioned that the rope touching the boat should not be tied to the ground, which is a village *sīmā*.

**Q. Will there be *sīmā-saṅkāra* if there are roots or other objects under the ground touching the *baddhasīmā* from outside?**

No, objects under the ground (*bhumigatika*) do not create *sīmā-saṅkāra*. Only objects above the ground create *sīmā-saṅkāra*.

**Q. Can monks chant the *kammavācā* for *sīmā* consecration from outside the boundary sign?**

No.

**Q. Can different boundary markers (*nimitta*) be used within a single *sīmā*?**

Yes.

They are outside.

**Q. In how many ways can the *sīmā* be removed?**

There are two ways. First, monks remove it using the formal procedure. Second, when the *Buddhasāsana* disappears.

### **Appendix (i) Procedure for fixing boundary marks (*nimitta*)**

An expert in Vinaya: What is the sign in the eastern direction? (*puratthimāya disāya kiṃ nimittam?*)

Boundary marker: It is mountain, Venerable Sir! (*Pabbato bhante*)

An expert in Vinaya: This mountain is the boundary marker (*eso pabbato nimittam*)

(It should be repeated for each direction and ended by fixing the first mark again.)

### **Appendix (ii) *Kammavācā* for Removing *Sīmā***

First the ‘non-separation’ *sīmā* should be removed. After that the ‘non-separation’ *sīmā*. The *kammavācā* for the removal of ‘non-separation’ *sīmā* is thus:

“*Suṇātu me, bhante, saṅgho. Yo so saṅghena ticīvarena avippavāso sammato, yadi saṅghassa pattakallaṃ, saṅgho taṃ ticīvarena avippavāsaṃ samūhaneyya. Esā ñatti.*

“*Suṇātu me, bhante, saṅgho. Yo so saṅghena ticīvarena avippavāso sammato, saṅgho taṃ ticīvarena avippavāsaṃ samūhanati. Yassāyasmato khamati etassa ticīvarena avippavāsassa samugghāto, so tuṇhassa; yassa nakkhamati, so bhāseyya. Samūhato so saṅghena ticīvarena avippavāso. Khamati saṅghassa, tasmā tuṇhī, evametam dhārayāmi*”*ti.*

‘Venerable sirs, let the Community listen to me. Whatever non-separation from three robes was agreed upon by the Community if it seems right to the Community the Community may remove that non-separation from three robes. This is the motion.

Venerable sirs, let the Community listen to me. Whatever non-separation from three robes was agreed upon by the Community, the Community removes that non-separation from three robes. If the removal of non-

separation from three robes is pleasing to the venerable ones, they should be silent; he to whom it is not pleasing should speak. The Community has removed the non-separation from the three robes. It is pleasing to the Community; therefore, it is silent; I consider it thus.”

➤ **The *kammavācā* for removal of ‘same communion’ *sīmā*:**

“*Suṇātu me, bhante, saṅgho. Yā sā saṅghena sīmā sammata samānasaṃvāsā ekuposathā, yadi saṅghassa pattakallaṃ, saṅgho taṃ sīmaṃ samūhaneyya samānasaṃvāsaṃ ekuposathaṃ. Esā ñatti.*

“*Suṇātu me, bhante, saṅgho. Yā sā saṅghena sīmā sammata samānasaṃvāsā ekuposathā, saṅgho taṃ sīmaṃ samūhanati samānasaṃvāsaṃ ekuposathaṃ. Yassāyasmato khamati etissā sīmāya samānasaṃvāsāya ekuposathāya samugghāto, so tuṇhassa; yassa nakkhamati, so bhāseyya. Samūhatā sā sīmā saṅghena samānasaṃvāsā ekuposathā. Khamati saṅghassa, tasmā tuṇhī, evametam dhārayāmi*”*ti.*

‘Venerable sirs, let the Community listen to me. Whatever boundary was agreed upon by the Community for the same communion, for one Observance, if it seems right to the Community the Community may remove this boundary which has same communion and one Observance. This is the motion.

Venerable sirs, let the Community listen to me. Whatever boundary was agreed upon by the Community for the same communion, for one Observance the Community removes this boundary to regard that boundary which has same communion and one Observance. If the removal of this boundary which has same communion and one Observance is pleasing to the venerable ones, they should be silent; he to whom it is not pleasing should speak. This boundary which has the same communion and one Observance has been removed by the Community. It is pleasing to the Community; therefore, it is silent; I consider it thus.”

### Appendix (iii) *Kammavācā* for Consecrating *Sīmā*

First the ‘same dwelling’ *sīmā* should be consecrated by reciting the following *kammavācā*:

*“Suṇātu me, bhante, saṅgho. Yāvatā samantā nimittā kittitā. Yadi saṅghassa pattakallaṃ, saṅgho etehi nimित्तेhi sīmāṃ sammanneyya samānasaṃvāsāṃ ekuposathaṃ. Esā ñatti.*

*“Suṇātu me, bhante, saṅgho. Yāvatā samantā nimittā kittitā. Saṅgho etehi nimित्तेhi sīmāṃ sammannati samānasaṃvāsāṃ ekuposathaṃ. Yassāyasmato khamati etehi nimित्तेhi sīmāya sammuti samānasaṃvāsāya ekuposathāya, so tuṇhassa; yassa nakkhamati, so bhāseyya. Sammatā sīmā saṅghena etehi nimित्तेhi samānasaṃvāsā ekuposathā. Khamati saṅghassa, tasmā tuṇhī, evametaṃ dhārayāmī”ti.*

‘Venerable sirs, let the Community listen to me. In as much as boundary marks all round have been announced, if it seems right to the Community the Community may agree upon within these boundary marks a boundary which has same communion and one Observance. This is the motion.

Venerable Sir, let the Community listen to me. In as much as boundary marks all round have been announced, the Community agrees upon within these boundary marks a boundary which has same communion and one Observance. If the agreement upon a boundary which has same communion and one Observance is pleasing to the venerable ones, they should be silent; he to whom it is not pleasing should speak. Within these boundary marks, a boundary which has same communion and one Observance is agreed upon by the Community. It is pleasing to the Community; therefore, it is silent; I consider it thus.

- After the consecration of ‘same dwelling’ *sīmā*, the ‘non-separation’ *sīmā* should be consecrated:

*“Suṇātu me, bhante, saṅgho. Yā sā saṅghena sīmā sammatā samānasaṃvāsā ekuposathā, yadi saṅghassa pattakallaṃ saṅgho taṃ sīmaṃ ticīvarena avippavāsaṃ sammanneyya. Esā ñatti.*

*“Suṇātu me, bhante, saṅgho. Yā sā saṅghena sīmā sammatā samānasaṃvāsā ekuposathā, saṅgho taṃ sīmaṃ ticīvarena avippavāsaṃ sammannati. Yassāyasmato khamati etissā sīmāya ticīvarena avippavāsāya sammuti, so tuṇhassa; yassa nakkhamati, so bhāseyya. Sammatā sā sīmā saṅghena ticīvarena avippavāsā. Khamati saṅghassa, tasmā tuṇhī, evametaṃ dhārayāmi”ti.*

‘Venerable sirs, let the Community listen to me. Whatever boundary was agreed upon by the Community for the same communion, for one Observance, if it seems right to the Community the Community may agree to regard that boundary as a place for non-separation from the three robes. This is the motion.

Venerable sirs, let the Community listen to me. Whatever boundary was agreed upon by the Community for the same communion, for one Observance the Community agrees to regard that boundary as a place for non-separation from the three robes. If the agreement to regard this boundary as a place for non-separation from the three robes is pleasing to the venerable ones, they should be silent; he to whom it is not pleasing should speak. This boundary is agreed upon the by Community to be regarded as a place for non-separation from the three robes. It is pleasing to the Community; therefore, it is silent; I consider it thus.

## References:

1. *Mahāvagga Pāḷi*
2. *Mahāvagga Aṭṭhakathā*, Ācariya Buddhaghosa
3. *Vimativinodanī-tīkā*, Coḷaraṭṭha Kassapa
4. *Vinaya-mahāvagga Bhāsāṭīkā*, Book 1, Sayadaw Janakābhivaṃsa
5. *Teachings on Sīmā*, Mahāsi Sayadaw
6. *Teachings on Sīmā by Mahāgandhāyon Sayadaw*, Tharmanaykyaw Sayadaw
7. *Lectures on Sīmā*, Sayadaw Silānanda